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## Senior Capstone Project final report : helping stop the intergenerational cycle of violence

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Senior Capstone Project Final Report

Helping Stop the Intergenerational Cycle of Violence

**Keywords:** children, youth, support groups, sharing, expressing feelings, fun activities, curriculum, anger management, support, breaking the silence, Watsonville.

**Abstract:** This project was conducted directly with the Children and Youth Program at Women's Crisis Support ~ Defensa De Mujeres in Watsonville. The main focus was to help break the intergenerational cycle of violence trend and help break the silence. This was done providing support groups with a structured curriculum and by providing the children and youth with a safe environment to share and learn at the same time.

## Executive Summary

Women's Crisis Support ~ Defensa de Mujeres (WCS~DdM) is a non-profit agency that has been around for several years assisting the community from Santa Cruz County. This agency envisions a community free of domestic violence and sexual assault, by providing intervention and prevention services in a cultural sensitive way, in hope of breaking the trend of domestic violence. They have a commitment in supporting children, youth, women, and underserved groups.

The main problem my capstone project will address is the intergenerational cycle of violence that has existed for many years affecting the most vulnerable individuals who are children and youth. The un-necessary acts of violence have severe negative impacts on those who witness them or are victims. Children exposed to domestic violence will have a high percentage chance of engaging in similar activities as they grow older. This negative events will only nourish the intergenerational cycle of violence in our communities.

My capstone project was implemented in the Children and Youth Program. Developing a structure curriculum will be a stepping stone in helping break the intergenerational cycle of violence. By allowing children to tell and re-tell their story and in the process allow them to learn healthy ways of dealing with their anger, will hopefully prepare them with useful skills that will prevent them from engaging in acts of violence towards their peers or in the near future towards their loved ones.

Overall, my project results demonstrated some positive and in some areas minimal impact. Furthermore, my recommendations would be to somehow have more children participate in the groups so that the attrition rate won't affect the end product

results.

### Agency Description

Women's Crisis Support and Defensa de Mujeres (WCS~DdM) is a non-profit corporation that envisions a community free of domestic violence and sexual assault. Their mission is to end domestic violence and sexual assault by providing intervention and prevention services in a culturally-sensitive way. They serve the community of Santa Cruz County, with a special commitment to women, youth, children, Latinas, and other underserved groups. All members of WCS~DdM serve as leaders for social change for the advantage of the community by getting involved with advocacy, shaping policy and collaborating with community partners.

Since 1978, the agency has been actively involved in providing services that range from domestic violence and sexual assault, crisis prevention to intervention services in the Santa Cruz County. That same year, for the same county in California, a shelter-based service was established by the agency to support battered women.

In 1988 WCS~DdM was two separate agencies that served different areas of Santa Cruz County. Women's Crisis Support served the City of Santa Cruz and Defensa de Mujeres served the City of Watsonville. In 1988 they both contracted with a main focus to provide bilingual and bicultural domestic violence services to the south county area's primarily Latina clientele. For several years both agencies operated independently, while successfully meeting the special needs of the community. Discussions for implementation of a merger were expressed by both sides and by 2000 the organizations began to operate under an administrative consolidation. WCS~DdM currently maintains client service offices in both Watsonville and Santa Cruz areas, as well as a confidential

shelter facility.

### Problem

According to the research conducted by the Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse (1999), domestic violence has been a way of life since 753 B.C. “During the reign of Romulus in Rome, wife beating is accepted and condoned under The Laws of Chastisement. Under these laws, the husband has absolute rights to physically discipline his wife.” It is important to understand that domestic violence is not the best way to act when disciplining someone or trying to solve our problems. Domestic violence has come a long way and it was not until the 1970’s that “battered women are able to legally claim compensation for their injuries” (Minnesota Center Against Violence and Abuse, 1999).

According to Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (2001), “Domestic Violence is a pattern of coercive behavior in which one person attempts to control another through threats or actual use of tactics, which may include any or all of the following: physical, sexual, verbal and psychological abuse.” It is essential to understand that domestic violence is a problem that exists everywhere and that it affects everyone as a whole, including the most vulnerable and innocent living beings who are the children and teens. “Domestic violence is widespread and...between 53% and 70% of male batterers (...assaulted their wives) also frequently abused their children” (Volpe, 2006). Children and teens who witness, or were victims of the unnecessary act of domestic violence, end up severely traumatically affected. In many cases those children who were exposed to domestic violence at home will have a high probability of engaging in similar acts of violence as they grow older. These violent episodes will only nourish the

generational cycle of violence that WCS~DdM intensively tries to stop. “Children who are exposed to domestic violence are more likely to exhibit behavioral and physical health problems including depression, anxiety, and violence towards peers” (Family Violence Prevention Fund). There is no need to continue using acts of violence in our lives, therefore, appropriate actions need to take place in order to address this problem that has existed for so long.

WCS~DdM is an agency devoted to serve the victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Their main goal is to end the continuum acts of violence mentioned above, that have managed to spread into the lives of many families. The Children and Youth Program is one of the many services provided by WCS~DdM. The mission of this program is to end the generational cycle of violence by providing comprehensive prevention and crisis intervention services in a safe environment to children, youth, and their parents. The unwanted acts of domestic violence will be diminished by working closely with children, youth, and their parents. This will be done by providing them with assistance, support, safe place to share, options, and strategies to help them deal with their problems in a healthier and safe manner.

Research have shown that support groups are of great help to children who come from an abusive family. Allowing children to tell and re-tell their story in a safe environment where other participants have experience similar situations, give the child a sense of order. “Expressing fears or concerns can sometimes relieve tension or anxiety, telling and retelling their story may help children create a sense of order, coherence, or control over events that seem chaotic, confusing, or overwhelming...hearing other children’s stories may help them realize that they are not alone in their fears or

concerns...”(University of Illinois Extension). Children deserve the opportunity to tell their story and be respected, the Children and Youth Program provides a safe place to share and to learn.

### Capstone Project

My capstone project was directly incorporated in the Children and Youth Program. Like mentioned before on the problem section, the Children and Youth Program’s main focus is to provide crisis intervention and prevention services to children, youth, and their parents. My main role was to manage and facilitate the children and youth groups in Watsonville, California. I was in charge of re-structuring and modifying the anger management curriculum. In the process I found, implemented, and included active involvement activities to the anger management curriculum which were guided towards meeting the unique learning styles of all children and youth who attended the groups.

As I mention in the previous paragraph, I facilitated the children and youth groups. I met with children and youth every Tuesday for an hour and a half. The children and youth were given a survey before the old curriculum was implemented. This survey was developed to measure the participants knowledge on the topic of anger management. Then the old curriculum was facilitated by an advocate. The old curriculum was conducted during four Tuesday’s. For every Tuesday of the month there is a different objective. An example, for the first Tuesday of the week the objective would be to encourage children to talk about anger and exploring what events or things triggers their anger. All objectives are contingent to activities. The activities are enforced to help the children and youth understand the theme and to feel encouraged to share as well as to

help meet the objective for the week. Most of the activities range from group discussions, case scenarios, role plays, and hands on activities.

After the end of the four weeks of facilitating the old curriculum, the children were given the same survey again to see where they stand knowledge wise and if the old curriculum had an influence on their learning (retaining the information) pertaining to the anger management theme. I then took the initiative and facilitated the new curriculum I developed for the same amount of time as the old curriculum. At the end of the fourth meeting I gave the children and youth the survey again (the survey was given a total of three times) to see if their knowledge improved, or stayed the same regarding the theme of anger management.

Activities are a crucial part of the groups since children and youth express their feelings or thoughts differently. Finding appropriate and fun activities such as role plays, scenarios, sharing, writing, drawing, and paintings in a safe environment can help motivate those involved in the opening process of self-expression. “If the child expresses a desire to talk, provide them with an opportunity to express their thoughts and feelings... also encouraged to write in a journal, draw, or paint; these are all viable means for facilitating expression in younger children” (Volpe, 1999). I made sure to provide a safe environment for the children and youth who attended the groups. It was my mission to communicate the information from my curriculum in an easy to understand approach and also try my best to allow the children to leave home feeling better than how they came in.

I understand the need for support groups, this is why my capstone was developed specifically for the children and youth from WCS~DdM. I believe that my curriculum is a stepping stone towards ending the intergenerational cycle of violence. It will take

more to end this unpleasant reality that has existed for so long, but the fight will continue and soon the trend will be broken.

### CSUMB Vision Statement

The vision statement of the California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) emphasizes giving students the opportunity to “learn and teach one another in an atmosphere of respect and pursuit of excellence.” I’m proud of my role as a facilitator for the children and youth program. Everyone respects and learns from one another’s unique ideas as well as expressions. I’m proud in connecting my unique talents to the CSUMB vision statement of “serving the diverse people of California, especially the working class and... low-income populations.” The children and youth I work with are diverse in several aspects (age, family composition, gender, language,...) which enriches the group meetings because every individual comes with special ideas and thoughts which helps create a much more wonderful learning environment for all.

### Major Learning Outcomes

My capstone project will provide evidence of three different major learning outcomes (MLO); collaboration, leadership, and personal and professional communication. Collaboration was an essential MLO that helped me get different ideas, perspectives, and support from my mentor as well as from different staff from WCS~DdM in behalf of the different activities implement in the Children and Youth Program. The leadership MLO is evidence of my ability to manage and facilitate the children and youth groups. Finally, the personal and professional communication MLO demonstrates my ability to articulate the weekly topic information in an appropriate language that the children and youth understood. The last MLO demonstrates my ability

to communicate and report to my mentor the effectiveness of each activity I implemented for each weekly group topic.

### Conclusion

The table on page 10 will provide a brief statistical summary of my project results. As you could see in the column title GAMMA represents the statistic of association for each variable (represent each question on the survey) on the left and a binary variable representing the pre and post test. The gamma statistics colored in blue represent that my curriculum had a positive impact knowledge wise (some children can identify when someone is getting angry and know what to do when their parents fight). The gamma statistics colored in red represent that my curriculum had a very minimal impact knowledge wise (some children don't know how to calm down when they are angry).

Overall my results show some positive and some very minimal impacts, however, these results might be explained because of the first three variables that read sex, age, how long have you been coming to the group. What this means is that there were more boys during the post test which is my curriculum than the pre test. Also, there were more older kids during the post test than the pre test. Finally, and most important there were more new first time comers during the post test than the pre test. Further more the only statistically significant impact (as shown by p value of the chi square statistic) was data variable that reads I can control my anger colored in yellow.

	perpost	chi2	pvalue
	<b>GAMMA</b>	<b>X2</b>	<b>Pval</b>
<b>sex</b>	-0.28	0.29	0.590
<b>age</b>	0.61	1.33	0.248
<b>How long have you been coming to the group</b>	-0.63	5.28	0.152
I know what anger is	-1	2.62	0.105
I know how to calmdown when I get angry	-0.6	2.8	0.247
I can tell when someone is angry	0.31	2.23	0.694
Others can make me angry	0.6	3.11	0.375
When parent fight I should get in the middle to stop them	0.11	5.14	0.273
Feeling angry is not normal	0.56	3.17	0.367
I can tell when I'm getting angry	-0.71	3.25	0.355
Anger should be kept inside	-0.16	4.33	0.363
I can control my anger	-0.32	5.66	0.059
Angry people can control what they do	-0.13	2.64	0.449

My project benefited my agency in various ways. First, of all some of the children benefited from some important factors that pertain to anger management. Hopefully some of the skills that the children learned from my curriculum can be implemented in their daily lives whenever they find themselves with an unpleasant situation that triggers their anger. Another way my agency benefited is that I have developed a curriculum and survey that can be used over again with a larger group so that the attrition rate won't affect the results as bad if children do drop out before any four session period.

I learned several things from my capstone project. One thing I learned was leadership skill, since, I had the privileged to manage and facilitate the children and youth program. I also learned professional communication skills which allowed me to find creative ways to present the information to the children in a way that was understandable and not confusing. Another thing I learned was how to conduct research and gathering data and then transferring it to excel. In the process I learned how to analyze and evaluate all my findings that helped me come up with a specify conclusion that states whether my

program was effective or not. Last, and most important I learn the need for positive role models in the lives of children who come from domestic violence backgrounds. I learned that children just want to have a good time, laugh, smile, play, have some control over activities they want to do, have someone that will listen to them and that will provide them some quality time. It was an honor for me to have been the person that provided this children with a safe environment where they had the opportunity to share their experiences and a place where they were respected. I made sure to do all that was in my hands to provide all the children who participated in the groups with knowledge that pertains to anger management in a fun and exiting way that hopefully made them leave home feeling much better than how they came to the group.

One of my main problems was attrition (kids dropping out after the pretest) so my recommendation for future evaluations of this curriculum is to some how keep track of the children to observe their growth with my curriculum individually and as a group. Another recommendation is to have more children participate in the groups to increase the power of test and minimize the attrition problem.

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#### Additional Documentation

Attached you will find:

A. Anger management survey

B. Pre (old) and Post (new) curriculum